The Generous and Pious

Forty years of the life of Imam Ali ar-Ridha (peace be upon him) had passed, and he still had no son to inherit the Imamate. On the tenth of Rajab, in the year 195 AH, the followers of Imam Ridha were blessed with the auspicious birth of the sole heir to their Imam. Imam Muhammad al-Jawad's (peace be upon him) birth helped ease the anxiety that many Shias were having at the time with regards to who would continue the Imamate after Imam Ridha.

His Blessed Lineage

Imam al-Kadhim (peace be upon him) had spoken highly of the virtue and great status that belonged to Imam Jawad's mother. Lady Sabika (also known as Khaizarun) was from the same family as Maria Qutbiya, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny). The Prophet himself sent blessings upon the pious Lady Sabika. He told his companions, "My father be sacrificed on the mother of the ninth Imam, who will be a pure and pious Nubian." The parents of Imam Jawad were both granted a great status among the believers and were recognized for their piety, fear of Allah, and worship.

His Titles

The Imam was characterized by many epithets that accurately reflected His sublime virtues, among them being: Al-Jawad: The generous, which is an accurate reflection of Imam Jawad's many acts of kindness and charity. The life of our ninth Imam exemplified benevolence and generosity. The door of Imam Jawad was always open to the poor who would come to him for food. The Imam would also seek the poor people of Medina at night and bring to them whatever items he could.

Al-Taqi: The Pious. Imam Jawad was married to Umm Fadhl, the daughter of Caliph Mamoon ar-Rashid. However, he continued to lead a simple life, opting for poverty instead of the deceiving wealth that his wife was attached to. The Imam also resisted the plans of the Abbasid caliph who tried to stray him off the righteousness with material items. Instead, Imam Jawad found refuge in Allah, and these acts of piety also earned him the title Al-Mutawakkil (The Reliant on Allah).

Al-Qani' and Ar-Radhi: The Content. Imam Jawad used to lead a life of simplicity, free from the shackles of greed. His clothes used to be made from a very basic fabric that was anything but extravagant. One day, when someone approached the Imam about his dress and asked

why he didn't choose to don more expensive dress, Imam Jawad replied, "We Ahlul Bayt are content on whatever we get, and we do not allow greed to approach us."

The Miraculous Imamate

At the time of Imam Ridha's death, Imam Jawad was only 9 years old. Naturally, there were those that believed that due to his youth, the Imam could not inherit something as significant and great as the Imamate. However, it soon became apparent to even the most learned of Islamic scholars that Muhammad Jawad possessed a level of knowledge that no fallible could claim. Imam Ridha had declared his son as next Imam, and when his companions inquired about Imam Jawad's tender age, Imam Ridha told them, "Allah sent Jesus the son of Mary (as a prophet) though he was even younger than Abu Ja'far (Imam Jawad) will be when he shall become the Imam."

Even at a young age, Imam Jawad held a level of piety, knowledge, forbearance, and justice only known to the divinely appointed Prophets and Imams. He was thus able to challenge even the most learned in Islamic sciences. One such example would be his encounter with Yahya ibn Akhtham, who was at the time considered among the most learned of scholars. He had attempted to humiliate the Imam (who was at the time very young) by asking him: "What is atonement for a person who hunts while he is dressed in the pilgrimage garb (Ahram)?" The prodigious Imam calmly replied to the question posed, "Your question is utterly vague and lacks definition.

You should first clarify whether the game killed was outside the sanctified area or inside it, whether the hunter was aware of his sin or did so in ignorance, did he kill the game purposely or by mistake, was the hunter a slave or a free man, was he adult or minor, did he commit the sin for the first time or had he done so before, was the hunted game a bird or something else, was it a small animal or a big one, is the sinner sorry for the misdeed or does he insist on it, did he kill it secretly at night or openly during daylight, was he putting on the pilgrimage garb for Hajj or for the Umra? Unless you clarify and define these aspects, how can you have a definite answer?!"

Imam Jawad's responses caused both laymen and clerics alike to be astounded by his endless knowledge in jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, and the science of traditions. At this point, it had become obvious to everyone, including the Caliph, that God-given knowledge was not bound by age and did not depend on material resources.

Pearls by Imam Jawad

Imam Jawad's character and piety occupied the highest position possible for a human, and his traditions are a testament to his moral excellence:

Having reliance in God is more of (value or worth) and more precious of anything and is a traddle towards perfections.

Don't be among those that apparently are friends with God, but His enemy in behind!

And do know that indeed Allah is the All-Clement and All-Knowing, and His wrath is upon the one who does not accept His pleasure. And verily the one who does not accept His grant is refused that. And the one who does not accept His guidance goes astray.

Tending rewards God by hearts is more impressive than tiring members by deeds.

Increase of blessing is not interrupted by God, unless thanksgiving is interrupted by slaves.

The Martyrdom of Imam Jawad

Imam Jawad was murdered by his wife Umm Fadhl, who poisoned his food when the Imam was only 25 years of age. His Imamate had only lasted 17 years, but however short his leadership was for the Muslims, his life continues as an example of forbearance and generosity. Imam Jawad, like the rest of the Infallibles, lived a life in which they were tyrannically opposed for being sources of guidance and justice for the Muslims against a corrupt leadership.

References:

(1) Akhlaq al-Aimma: Morals of the Imams

(2) The Infallibles: Imam Muhammad al-Taqi

(3) The Life of Imam Muhammad al-Taqi